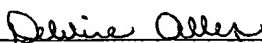


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APPLICATION FOR LETTERS PATENT

FOR

DEVICE TO CONTROL A PIEZOELECTRIC ACTUATOR

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DEVICE TO CONTROL A PIEZOELECTRIC ACTUATOR

Cross Reference to Related Application

This application is a continuation of copending International
5 Application No. PCT/DE02/01029 filed March 21, 2002 and claiming a priority date
of March 21, 2001, which designates the United States.

Technical Field of the Invention

The invention relates to a device for controlling a piezoelectric
actuator, in particular a fuel injection valve of an internal combustion engine,
10 comprising an energy source which supplies the actuator with energy, whereby the
extension of the piezoelectric actuator corresponds with a predetermined response to
changes in temperature.

Background of the Invention

A device of this type is known from DE 196 52 801 C1. The energy
15 source in this invention supplies the piezoelectric actuator with a specified amount of
energy for which the value is derived from a temperature-dependent key field.

The speed and stability of piezoelectrically controlled injection valves
for internal combustion engines, both for petrol and also for diesel applications, has
made them ever more attractive to auto makers. However the reproducibility of the
20 amount of fuel injected depends directly on the precision of the movements of the
valve needle. Since the needle is driven directly by a piezoelectric actuator via a
movement converter or a servo valve in the diesel area it is necessary to control this
actuator across the entire temperature range electrically with the appropriate precision.

DE 196 52 801 C1 proposes supplying the piezoelectric actuators with
25 constant energy, with the value of the energy to be actually fed being obtained from
the measured temperature from a key field and the charge voltage being subject to
regulation to arrive at the desired amount of energy.

Controlling a typical piezoelectrically operated injection valve with constant energy however means that it loses around a 15% extension in the temperature range from 0°C to 125°C in accordance with Figure 2. It would now be possible to regulate the energy here too through a corresponding key field to a larger amount of energy at higher temperatures, to compensate for the loss of extension. This is however only possible if in the final stage there is sufficiently large computing power available and when the energy feed to the actuator can be measured within the device.

Summary of the Invention

10 The object of the present invention is, thus, to develop a device in accordance with the generic model in a simple way so as to achieve better compensation for needle extension losses.

 The object can be achieved by a device for controlling a piezoelectric actuator, in particular a fuel injection valve of an internal combustion engine, comprising an energy source which supplies the actuator with energy, whereby the extension of the piezoelectric actuator corresponds with a predetermined response to changes in temperature, and a compensation capacitor which is connected in parallel with the piezoelectric actuator for which the capacitance is dimensioned in such a way that, for a constant amount of energy delivered by the energy source the extension of the actuator is almost constant across the temperature range.

 The energy source, a controller controlling the energy source and a compensation capacitor can be accommodated in a housing and are connected via a cable with the piezoelectric actuator. The energy source, a control circuit controlling the energy source, the compensation capacitor, and the piezoelectric actuator can also be accommodated in a housing, whereby the control circuit can be controlled by an external controller. The compensation capacitor may have a capacitance of around 10,5µF. The housing can be a fuel injection valve housing. The device may further

comprise a temperature sensor coupled with the external controller for determining the temperature of the housing. The device may also comprise a measurement line coupled with the controller and the actuator used to determine the voltage at the actuator. The device may further comprise a temperature sensor coupled with the
5 actuator and electrically coupled with a measurement line used to transmit the temperature value of the actuator to the controller.

The object can also be achieved by a method for controlling a piezoelectric actuator, in particular a fuel injection valve of an internal combustion engine, comprising the steps of:

- 10 - supplying the actuator with energy, whereby the extension of the piezoelectric actuator corresponds with a predetermined response to changes in temperature, and
- compensating the extension of the piezoelectric actuator by means of a capacitor coupled in parallel with the actuator, wherein the capacitance is dimensioned in such a way that, for a constant amount of energy delivered by the energy source the extension
15 of the actuator is almost constant across the temperature range.

The method may further comprise the step of sensing the voltage of the actuator and/or the step of sensing the temperature of the actuator.

Accordingly the device is designed in such a way that a compensation
20 capacitor is connected in parallel with the piezoelectric actuator with capacitance is dimensioned in such a way that for a constant amount of energy supplied by the energy source the expansion of the actuator is almost constant over the temperature range.

The capacitance of the piezoelectric actuator increases as the
25 temperature rises, whereas the capacitance of the compensation capacitor remains more or less constant. The result is that, as the temperature increases, an increasing share of the constant amount of energy delivered by the energy source is stored in the

piezoelectric actuator so that the loss of extension can be almost entirely compensated for with suitable dimensioning of the compensation capacitor. In line with the invention no expensive regulation is needed here but merely a further component that must be suitably dimensioned.

5 The device in accordance with the invention to control a piezoelectric actuator can be used in a conventional manner in an internal combustion engine, whereby the piezoelectric actuator is designed as a unit with the fuel injection valve and is connected by a cable to a controller containing both the energy source with the downstream compensation capacitor and also a control circuit to control the energy
10 source.

 The device in accordance with the invention can however be used particularly advantageously in an "intelligent" fuel injection valve, since here not only the piezoelectric actuator is designed as a unit with the injection valve but also the energy source as well as a simple controller are arranged in this unit. In an
15 advantageous embodiment of the invention the compensation capacitor is also located in this unit and allows a particularly simple compensation for expansion losses here, provided the controller unit has sufficient computing power for the effort of regulation and a precise measurement of the actuator temperature is possible.

Brief Description of the Drawings

20 The invention is explained below in more detail with the aid of figures. The figures show:

Figure 1 a basic circuit diagram of a device for controlling a piezoelectric actuator in accordance with the prior art,

Figure 2 the graph for an actuator expansion across the range of temperatures
25 with a constant energy feed,

Figure 3a basic circuit diagram of a device for controlling a piezoelectric actuator in accordance with the invention,

Figure 4 the graph of the energy fed into an actuator in accordance with the prior art and in accordance with the invention,

5 **Figure 5** a first use of the invention and

Figure 6 a second use of the invention

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments

Figure 1 shows a device for controlling a piezoelectric actuator for a
10 fuel injection valve as is normal in the prior art. An actuator Cp is supplied by an energy source EQ with a constant amount of energy Eo.

Figure 2 shows the graph of the expansion of a piezoelectric actuator depending on the temperature of the actuator when a constant amount of energy of 60 mJ is applied. As can be seen, in the temperature range of 0°C to 125°C the actuator
15 loses appr. 15% extension which must be compensated for where possible to ensure that the desired amount of fuel is really injected when the actuator is used in a fuel injection valve.

Figure 3 shows a basic circuit diagram of a device in accordance with the invention. Unlike the circuit shown in Figure 1 a compensation capacitor Co is
20 connected in parallel with the piezoelectric actuator Cp, whereby both capacitors are supplied by the energy source with a constant amount of energy Eo. In this case an amount of energy is allotted to the actuator.

25
$$E_p = E_0 \cdot \frac{C_p / C_o}{1 + C_p / C_o}$$

The graph of the amount of energy E_p allotted to the actuator as a function of the ratio of the capacitance of the actuator to the capacitance of the compensation capacitor C_p/C_o is shown in Figure 4. The figure also shows the graph of the amount of energy for a circuit in accordance with Figure 1.

5 As can be seen from the graph of the above function, the energy E_p stored in a piezoelectric actuator increases as the actuator capacitance C_p increases and thereby with increasing temperature so that the loss of extension can be compensated for.

10 Normal control circuits for piezoelectric actuators contain an energy source EQ, a control circuit ST to control the energy source EQ in a controller SG which is connected via a cable K with the piezoelectric actuator C_p or is linked to a fuel injection valve containing the actuator C_p . When a device in accordance with the invention is used to control a piezoelectric actuator, the compensation capacitor C_o is also located in the controller SG, as shown in Figure 5. Measurement line L can be
15 used to transfer the voltage at the actuator C_p or its temperature to the control circuit, in order to be able to regulate the extension for example. Although in such normal control circuits there is mostly already a capacitor at the output of energy source EQ this is there exclusively to comply with EMC guidelines. The capacitance of such capacitors is around $2\mu F$. For compensation of temperature-related loss of extension in
20 accordance with the invention, the piezoelectric actuators normal today, such as those produced by EPCOS with external dimensions of $5 \times 5,5 \times 40,5 \text{ mm}$, a layer thickness of $80\mu m$ and SiPd contacting, need capacitances of around $10,5\mu F$.

25 A particularly advantageous use of the device in accordance with the invention presents itself with so-called "intelligent" fuel injection valves in which the piezoelectric actuator C_p , an energy source EQ and a control circuit ST as well as the compensation capacitor C_o in accordance with the invention are accommodated in the fuel injection valve housing. This is basically shown in Figure 6.

This figure also shows a measurement line L which is not however connected to the actuator itself for this version but merely to the housing of the fuel injection valve of which the temperature is measured.

5 Figure 6 also shows the controller SG to which on one side the signal on the measurement line L for processing is applied and on the other side can control the "intelligent" fuel injection valve with control signals.